imperfect beings

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imperfect beings

by figofswords

Summary

In which Simon Laurent does not die.

Notes

you ever start to relate a little too much to a character and get pretty attached only for him to become a villain and then Die? hahahahahahahha yeah ANYWAYS. after literal years of saying i'd watch infinity train, i finally am doing so. just finished season three like literally a couple hours ago and i am actually very extremely upset, so here's a fix-it/character study in protest.

Warnings: suicidal ideation, child neglect (mentioned), non-graphic blood/injuries

See the end of the work for more notes

Simon stares into the horrible gaping maw of the Ghom, nightmares made real again. As it pulls his life from him he thinks, *this is how it should be. This is how I should have died all those years ago when Samantha left me.*

But survival is ingrained in his bones, in his muscles, in his blood. A person does not fight for years only to give up at the end of it. So he kicks out with the last of his strength, shoves the Ghom away, and rolls.

He thinks he hears Grace cry out a warning of some sort. He doesn't want to look at her. He reaches out his arm to stop his momentum and is met only with empty space. It is too late to adjust his weight, too late to grab onto something. And he is tired. He is so, so tired.

So he falls. And the last thing he sees before his back hits the ground is Grace's tear-streaked face, turning away.

The pain when he hits the ground is blinding, knocking the air from his lungs and shattering two of his ribs on impact. His consciousness flickers in and out as he bounces and rolls clear of the wheels, out onto the baked red earth. Everything hurts, inside and out, and his blurred vision is overwhelmed by the glowing green from his number, but miraculously he does not die. Instead, he lies on his back beneath that alien sky, and wheezes, and laughs, and cries.

Things are fuzzy for a while. There's just the hard ground, the burning sky, and the wind off the train, and him and the blinding pain and the poison inside him. He fades in and out of consciousness some more, laughs some more, cries some more. He waits to die.

Maybe the Ghoms will get him. Maybe his injuries will. Or maybe he'll die slowly and painfully from dehydration or starvation or some radiation or toxin in this empty world. Maybe he'll just waste away. It doesn't really matter; there's no way he's making it back on the train, and there's nothing for him to go back to, anyway.

He'd never loved the train. Not really. There were times, of course, when he'd almost believed the lies he told about it being his *right*, but the truth of the matter was that the train was strange and alien and terrifying and always had been. It was a shifting space, impossible to understand, full of creatures that acted like people but weren't quite, who had never existed outside of their cars, who lived only to help or hinder or *hurt* humans like Simon, all piloted by some insane robot that thought it could fix people's problems by kidnapping them. As if Simon's problems before the trains had ever really been *his* to work through, as if he hadn't been a little boy at the mercy of a cruel world.

No, he'd never loved the train. But he *had* loved Grace.

It hurts just to think it, so he clenches his jaw and digs his fingers into the dirt beneath him. He hates her, he tells himself. He hates her. She abandoned him, just like Samantha had, just like his friends, his *parents*. He'd never been good enough for her. He'd never been good enough for any of them. So they'd left, one by one, and now he is going to die alone in the dirt with no one to mourn for him. And the worst part is that he probably deserves it.

He wonders if Tuba had been scared when he'd killed her. He wonders if nulls really *feel* at all. For all of his anger and resolve, there are times when he is certain that the nulls are just like them, feeling being with loves and fears, and those times are worse because it means Samantha had *chosen* to leave him, that the things that hurt him on that train did so because they *wanted* to. It was easier to think of them as empty space. It was easiest to hate them.

There is a crunch of earth beside him, the sound of light footsteps approaching. A Ghom, most likely. Fitting. He escaped that death twice, and here is the third coming to be his reckoning. He wishes he was brave enough to meet his death with his eyes open, but at his core he is still little more than a lonely and frightened boy.

"Open your eyes, Simon," says an all-too-familiar voice, and Simon wonders if he is hallucinating from the pain. She cannot be here. She would never come for him. It's not in her nature.

Still, he is so desperately alone, and his anger is bleeding out to be replaced by bone deep exhaustion. So he opens his eyes, just a crack, and there she is. If he didn't know better, he'd almost think she looks sad.

"Samantha," he wheezes. It comes out raw and cracked and reduces him to a fit of wet coughing that leaves blood on his lips. "What are you doing here?"

"Fixing my mistakes," says the Cat. "Get up, kitten. It's not your time to die yet."

He has to laugh at that, at the irony of her caring about that *now,* after all he's become. It hurts to laugh, but it hurts just to breathe, too, so what's the difference, really? He's beyond help already. Things can't really get much worse at this point.

"Go away," he says, and closes his eyes again. He doesn't want her face to be the last thing he sees before he dies.

"Simon."

"I said *go away!* " he spits, ragged and guttural and *burning* with all of the fire and all of the poison that's been choking his lungs for so long. "Leave me alone! It's what you do best, isn't it?"

There is a sudden weight on his chest, startling him enough that he opens his eyes again. She's sitting on him, faces inches from his, and he flinches back as much as he can. "I know I hurt you," says the Cat. "I know you're angry. But you don't have time for this. You need to get back on that train or you're going to die out here, and that strikes me as a very empty ending. Don't you want your revenge? On me? On Grace? Don't you want to find that infernal robot and tell him exactly what you think of his little train? You've fought so hard for so long. You're really going to just give up here?"

"I don't care anymore," says Simon. "It doesn't matter. Look at me, Samantha. My number is the highest of any there's ever been and look where it's got me. On my back, in the dirt, half-dead already. It doesn't make it hurt less. It doesn't make me less alone. I don't *care*."

She claws him. An honest-to-god swipe across his cheek. It's barely a scratch, and compared to the pain everywhere else it barely registers, but it still takes him by surprise. She's never done that before. Not when they'd traveled together, not when he'd stormed into her cabin for the first time or the second.

"Pull yourself together, kitten," hisses the Cat. "You're not going to die here. Get up."

He shakes his head. "It doesn't matter. There's no way I'm getting back on that train. My gear's broken."

"I have a replacement. Get up."

Simon lifts his head at that and looks past her, towards where a clear mechanical sphere that must be her shuttle sits. Strapped on top of the thing is a cable pack, just like the broken one digging painfully into his spine.

"Where did you get that?"

"I'm a collector, kitten. I collected it. Now *get up*, or I will have to start biting, and you *know* how uncivilized I find the prospect."

So, motivated by the last dregs of his will to survive, Simon gets up. He drags himself to her shuttle and slowly, painfully, pulls the pack on. And then, with a strength he didn't know he still possessed, he stands up and points the cables at the train.

"I hate you," he says before launching them.

"I know, kitten," says the Cat sadly. "I know."

He lands in an ungraceful heap on the bridge between cars and just lies on his back, staring at the sky. Everything hurts and something is wrong with his breathing. For all of that, he may still die anyway, and because he is so spent the thought makes him start up again with another round of wheezing laughter. There is something broken inside him, and it's not just his ribs. There are shards of glass in his mind, cutting and bleeding every good and sane thing out of him. He almost feels numb, now, and compared to the fear and the anger that have consumed him for as long as he can remember, the numbness is a relief.

"Let's go," says the Cat from somewhere far away. Simon tries to turn his head to look at her but he can't seem to move. All he can do is stare at the sky and struggle to breathe.

She's saying something else, but it's muffled now. He laughs again, coughs again, maybe cries again. Then everything goes black.

He dreams of Grace. Her laugh, her smile. Her fury and beauty and the confidence in her stride. He dreams of Grace: *we won't tell Simon. Just trust me! Can't you see she's scared? How could you do this? What's wrong with you? You're a monster.*

He dreams of Grace turning away.

He wakes in a library, shelves and shelves of books rising up and up and up into an infinite sky. His first car had been a library, just like this one, just like the one back home, where his parents would leave him for hours and hours and hours, where the other children would laugh and point and whisper and flee. They'd picked on him, at first, for the way that he dressed and acted, for being too small, too quiet, too serious, too lost in his own daydreams. His few friends had left him because he made them look bad, because he'd been *no fun*, and then the children had picked on him for being alone. Then he'd hurt them back, and then he'd *really* been alone. And his parents had said, *you're not studying hard enough*, and they'd said, *if you have time to pick fights you have time to study*, and they'd left him stranded in the school library for hours and hours and hours, even after school had closed and everyone else had gone home. When the librarian had finally kicked him out he'd stood outside in the dark and waited and waited and *waited and waited and waited—*

And then there'd been the train.

Now, he opens his eyes, sees books and books and books, and panics. His breath snags in his throat and then won't *un*snag. He can't exhale. He can't breathe. The world is spinning, his vision is blurring, and someone is shouting.

He passes out again. This time, he does not dream.

The second time he opens his eyes, that *woman* is there. Amelia. The one Grace claims—claimed—is their True Conductor.

"Oh, good," says Amelia, not sounding very enthused at all. "He's awake."

Simon just glares. He *wants* to start throwing punches, or run as far away as possible, but given the way it hurts just to breathe neither seems very feasible right now.

"Don't look at me like that," huffs Amelia. "I'm the one who patched you up, you know. Show a little gratitude."

"I don't want your help," snaps Simon. Or, at least, he tries to: he doesn't have the strength to fully open his jaw, so what he actually does is mumble out something that doesn't sound like actual words even to his own ears.

Amelia rolls her eyes. "Whatever," she says. Then she turns her head over her shoulder and, horrifyingly, calls out, "Cat! Your kid is awake!"

Simon wants to tell her that he's *not* a kid, and even if he was he's definitely not Samantha's *anything*. But, as previously established, he can't really speak, so he settles for intensifying his glare, which Amelia ignores entirely. *I'm going to wheel you*, he thinks, and then freezes. He'd wanted to wheel Grace, too. He'd *wanted to wheel Grace*.

Don't think about it. Don't think about it. Don't—

"Hello, kitten."

She sounds cautious. If Simon didn't know better, he'd almost think she also sounds *relieved*, which is ridiculous because he *knows* she doesn't actually care about him. He *knows*.

"Listen," she says, stepping neatly into his line of vision and sitting with her tail curled around her legs. "I know maybe this isn't the best time for this, but since you're currently incapacitated this might be the only chance I'll ever get. I just wanted to say that I'm sorry. Really and truly. I know I already said that before, but I am. Whether you believe me or not is up to you. Whether you *forgive* me or not is up to you. But the truth of the matter is that living creatures are never perfect. As much as we like to pretend to the contrary, we are flawed and imperfect beings. We make mistakes. We are selfish. We hurt people. Sometimes, we hurt the people we care about the very most."

Grace, thinks Simon, and then bites his own tongue. Grace had hurt him first by pushing him away again and again. She'd had her chance. She'd had *so many* chances.

But so had he. There's a reason she'd shut him out. There's a reason she'd feared what he might do. He knows that.

He looks away.

"Kitten," says the Cat. Says...Samantha. "*Simon*. I was a coward. It is in my nature to be cowardly. But I should not have left you. I've thought about that for a long time. And I did go back, you know. Eventually. But you were long gone, and I was certain you'd died, and that it was my fault. I hated myself for that. That doesn't change what I did, of course, guilt does nothing to fix our mistakes, but I *was* sorry and I still am. That's why I saved you now. Because I couldn't bear to watch you destroy yourself like that, knowing I had a hand in causing it." She sighs. "I don't ask for your forgiveness. I just wanted to let you know that I *do* care."

There is something hot and wet on Simon's cheeks. Maybe one of his wounds has opened up again. Maybe it's raining in the car. Maybe there's something wrong with his nerves. Maybe this is what dying feels like.

The wet reaches his lips and it tastes like salt.

Oh.

He's crying.

It is weeks before he's healed enough to set out again. His hair has grown past his shoulders and his face is scratchy with stubble. He is scarred and bandaged and his clothes are a wreck, but the most important change of all is his number, which has gone down almost all the way to his collarbone. He'd watched it tick lower and lower as the days passed, frightened at first, then uncaring, then fascinated.

Now, he stands before the library car's open door, looking out over the bridge. Loose strands of hair escape from the short braid he's pulled it into and tickle his cheeks. The smell of the wastelands and the sight of the red dirt below and the roiling sky above make his hands shake

so he grabs on tight to the handles of his cable pack to still them. Samantha stands by his side, waiting.

“Ready to try this again?” Simon asks, trying and failing to keep his tone light.

“Whenever you are,” says Samantha, but neither of them move.

After several moments, Simon takes a single step forward, and then halts again. “Do you think—” he says, and then has to stop to clear the lump that rises in his throat. “Do you think she’ll ever—do you think *I'll*—” He shakes his head firmly and changes tracks. “I still don’t forgive you, you know.”

Samantha chuckles. “I know,” she says. And then, hearing what he’d meant to say even if he couldn’t actually say it, she continues, “I think, even without forgiveness, we can all find redemption, in our own ways. We all keep moving forward, imperfect as we are.”

His number ticks down several digits further and Simon watches it go with an unfamiliar but not unwelcome sense of release. He won’t go to Grace. Not yet. Maybe not ever, with the rate her number had been decreasing. For all he knows he may never see her again. All he knows is that for now this is a journey he has to make himself.

“Alright,” he says, and faces forward. “Let’s go.”

He takes a step, and then another, and another.

End Notes

just so you know i wrote this because i'm attempting to convince myself this is actually what happened in canon because i am, as i mentioned previously, Upset

as a note i just realized i forgot hazel went with amelia so just assume amelia left her with one-one or something

thanks for reading! drop a comment and tell me what you thought, or visit me on tumblr @figofswords. im going to go lie down on the floor now

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